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Port Royal Sailors Benefit From On-Board Resource Center

ABOARD USS PORT ROYAL -- Sailors aboard USS Port Royal (CG 73) can look forward to a deployment that keeps them a little closer to home, thanks to a little ingenuity and a commitment to quality of life and professional development. Just prior to deploying with Expeditionary Strike Group One (ESG 1), the ship completed a renovation of its learning resource center and a larger, more user friendly classroom.

The renovations, completed within just a few days of setting sail, were largely performed by ship's force, and increased the size of the learning resource center (LRC) from a mere two-computer workspace, to a nine-station LRC, with email-capable computers with flat screen monitors. The classroom, formerly capable of holding only 18 sailors, can now hold up to 29 sailors, enough for a full ship's division. It has theater-style seating, equipped with cup holders. The space is used for everything from training, to Catholic mass and Protestant Bible study, to the ship's "movie night" location.

"We've been able to maximize training as a result of the changes to the classroom," said Ens. Horst Sollfrank, Port Royal's training officer. "The classroom is so popular, we have had to institute a sign-up system, and the sign-up sheet stays full," said Sollfrank.

Port Royal crewmembers are taking advantage of the resource center, using the computers for a variety of purposes. "I do a lot of research," said Engineman Third Class Jeffery Shaffer, 24, of Orange County, Ca. "Right now I'm researching sustainable agriculture. When I retire, I'd like to buy some land on the big island [of Hawaii] and farm it. I'd like my monthly expenses to be roughly zero, and sustainable agriculture is a good way to do it," Shaffer said.

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"I've got 10 months left in the Navy, so this is a lifesaver," said Damage Controlman Second Class Levon Steele, 25, of Ft. Worth, Tx. "I can look at colleges online, without being kicked out of the space because there's something else going on."

Steele referred to the standing rule that the space is strictly for the use of the crew as a resource center during working hours. This has enabled crewmembers to take advantage of the space without interrupting scheduled training or work by other departments. Before the room was created, there were two computers located in the ship's combat systems workspace. Personal time for research or emails to family had to be balanced with the need for scheduled training.

"Lots of times, they'd have meetings during working hours, so we didn't have access to computers at all," Steele said. "This new space has done wonders for the command."

Capt. Pat Allen, Port Royal's commanding officer, is pleased with the work his Sailors have done to make their ship more conducive to their personal and professional growth during deployment. "It's a long deployment," Allen said. "The crew deserves a place where it can do professional development and communicate with family back home. I'm proud of the work they've done."

USS Port Royal is scheduled to return to its homeport of Pearl Harbor, Hi. In April 2004.

